

TSS Closer Look: Abraham/Miranda II

Written by Ron Borges
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Edison Miranda can talk. Arthur Abraham is tired of listening.

Those facts alone do not assure that tonight's rematch between Abraham, the IBF middleweight champion, and his former challenger in an over-the-weight fight with no title at stake will be a stirring confrontation... but it won't hurt. What assures that it will be is their styles, which one might describe as spoiling for a fight, and the way Abraham's jaw felt after Miranda shattered it in two places in the fourth round of their first meeting in Wetzlar, Germany.

That was a bloody night of pain, confusion, shaky refereeing by the normally reliable Randy Neumann and dominance by Arthur. This despite the fact that Abraham not only won a unanimous decision despite his blood-filled mouth and the pain he had to endure to continue, but also because even had five points not been deducted from Miranda for various and sundry felonies and misdemeanors that night Abraham still would have won a majority decision with Miranda getting no better than a draw from any of the three judges.

Naturally the loud-mouthed Columbian returned to his adopted home in Miami and claimed he'd been foully treated in Germany, a familiar claim by American fighters who lose there but one not always based in fact. Abraham, after they finally unwired his jaw, countered by insisting the only thing foul was Miranda's style, which is aggressive in the extreme and all but devoid of defense and, frankly, one that pays only minimal attention to boxing's rules of etiquette.

Abraham (26-0, 21 KO) has successfully defended his title four times since, each fight won by knockout, but the level of opponent has left a bit to be desired. Miranda (30-2, 26 KO), meanwhile, has fought five times, winning four but being stopped in seven rounds by Kelly Pavlik in what was at the time a WBC middleweight title eliminator. He has won twice since moving up to super middleweight but against equally lack luster opposition, which is what makes this rematch intriguing on a lot of levels.

Not the least of them is Miranda's insistence on running his mouth and Abraham's clear disgust with the man.

"Abraham is making the biggest mistake of his life," Miranda warned about the champion's decision to come to Florida and face the man who dislodged his mandible at a catch weight of 166 pounds. "The last time I broke his jaw when I was weak and struggling to make 160 pounds. At super middleweight I'm so strong it's scary. I'll be surprised if he makes it five rounds.

"The last fight was the worst night of my career because I had the title stolen from me. Now we're on a level playing field and the only thing determining the outcome of the fight will be my fists.

"Abraham made me wait almost two years for my rematch and on Saturday I will make him pay

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for every minute I waited. I will not hesitate to destroy him when we're in the ring. This is a man's business and I don't know if he belongs here anymore."

Strong words from a strong puncher whose jaw, though never broken, has proven to be less than resilient itself. Miranda was not only knocked cold by Pavlik but was also dropped by Allan Green one fight earlier before returning the favor twice two rounds later. He was also wobbled several times by Abraham despite all the problems the champion was dealing with and rocked by Howard Eastman before he stopped him as well.

Such facts are not lost on Abraham but to him Miranda himself is a lost cause regardless of how this fight turns out.

"Does anyone really care what Miranda says?" Abraham asked this week. "He should tell his psychologist about his problems. Had I failed to beat a man who had his jaw broken twice, I would have retired immediately. I would rather work as a night watchman."

If these two guys fight anywhere near as well as they talk, SHOWTIME's audience will be in for an exciting and concussive night of boxing, with night watchmen across America abandoning their posts to find a TV screen. The question though is will they?

Miranda, for all his bluster, has horrendous defensive problems. He has won most of the time by overwhelming his opponents with his attack and then driving them into unconsciousness with powerful hooks and straight right hands.

But for all his chiseled physique, powerful punches and fearsome words, Edison Miranda has been hurt by an aging Eastman, dropped by Green before he sent Green to the floor twice himself in the final round to pull out the decision, wobbled and clearly beaten by Abraham and knocked out by Pavlik.

What that says about him is that for all his 26 knockouts in 30 victories, he has stopped only one of the top four fighters he's faced and been beaten by two of them because his defense is riddled with openings for a skillful opponent willing to take risks for the opportunity to punch him in his big mouth.

Abraham, though not as lethal a puncher, has never been beaten, survived a night with Miranda that doesn't figure to be duplicated, at least not in terms of the pain he had to endure, and clearly has enough power himself to set off the sound of wind chimes between Miranda's ears if he lands flush.

Taken all together one has to concede the danger Miranda represents to the champion but Abraham is at least as dangerous to Miranda if he can land first, which he did most often in their last meeting.

"It's an advantage for me that I already know Miranda," Abraham said. "I know how I will fight against him and that's why I know I'm prepared. It gives me even more security."

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“I know I have to be more active from the first bell on. It’s also important to stay concentrated. Miranda is a guy who makes you pay for your mistakes but I won’t give him a chance to do so.”

The most serious issue for Abraham is how he will handle the sheer intimidating presence of Miranda in the ring after what he did to the champion the last time they met. For the final eight rounds Abraham constantly was choosing between spitting out blood or swallowing it. Neither was much of an option but he had no other choice. The pain he had to endure cannot really be imagined when one considers how heavy handed Miranda is. The fact is he did it, which speaks to his mental toughness despite one moment where it appeared he was trying to quit when Neumann asked him if he wanted to continue.

Although Abraham has won four times since it was against far less dangerous opponents, guys who could not threaten him in the way Miranda’s wild attack most certainly could. What happens the first time he feels Miranda’s jaw-breaking power again? That’s one reason people will watch.

“In all my life as a boxing fan, and as a producer for more than 20 years, I have never seen anything like it,” said David Dinkins, Jr., executive producer of SHOWTIME Sports telecasts, of that first fight. “For a guy to fight through that kind of injury and win is truly remarkable. There’s some unfinished business here.”

Miranda feels the same way but if he could not win after unhinging the champion’s jaw with more than eight rounds to go, how can he hope to figure out a way to win under conditions that certainly will not be as adverse for Abraham as they were in the first fight?

Miranda seems to be banking on the fact he will feel stronger at 166 pounds than he did starving himself to make 160. He may but that doesn’t mean it will translate into increased damage to Abraham when he lands. And regardless of what he weighs none of that tonnage will reduce his alarming number of defensive lapses, which open him up to taking flush shots that over time often result in breaking you down, as was the case against Pavlik and Abraham.

He has also managed to convince himself that somehow the title was stolen from him in Germany and that now he will be on safer ground because the rematch is being fought in Florida. There was certainly some odd refereeing moments on Neumann’s part, and the five points in deductions seemed a bit harsh even though Miranda did fight like a guy who had never heard of the Marquis of Queensbury. Yet, in the end, he lost to a guy with a jaw broken in two places who he could never knock down despite the pain Abraham had to be feeling whenever Miranda landed flush.

Those facts are undeniable so what does he have to do to impose his will on Arthur Abraham? Break one of his arms?

If Miranda concludes he does, don’t put it past him to try but the larger issue for him will be what happens when Abraham’s shorter, straighter punches again land flush before he can deliver his own attack? When he wades in and begins to flail away like a drowning man and doesn’t hurt Abraham, who has never been off his feet in a fight, what is Edison Miranda’s next move?

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Last time he didn't have one. The fact of the matter is he won't be resorting to trying to box, at least not by any classic definition of what that means. Frankly, Abraham won't be doing much of that either although by comparison he could be made to look like an Armenian Willie Pep by comparison.

Miranda is a classic brawler, a guy who fights like he trains in an alleyway rather than in a gymnasium. Yet for all his flaws, Edison Miranda is a dangerous man. Not as dangerous as his words make him sound but far dangerous enough to unhinge a jaw or separate a man from his senses.

Arthur Abraham understands that more clearly than anyone else who has ever gotten into the ring with Miranda. If he has erased those pain-filled memories as he says he has, it seems likely the champion will box and batter his way to a second victory over a guy who, though always dangerous, has yet to remain dangerous enough long enough to win in the biggest nights of his career.